

asset is their home—it is our obligation to think about ways we can strengthen the insurance system; strengthen our levees so they do not break again and while people are struggling give them a hand.

Again, I am not asking for loan forgiveness. They have to pay back every penny. But let's give them a fighting chance to pay it back, over 10 years or 15 years. Let's not require them to take one grant program we have given them to build their home and the same day take it away because they have to fully pay their small business loan.

I understand Senator REID is going to call up this bill and try to get it passed. I surely hope nobody objects to it. It is a Landrieu-Lott bill, with Senator VITTER as well. Senator REID is going to call it up in a few minutes, and I hope nobody objects to it. But if they do object, I can promise you I am going to spend every day on the floor until this bill is passed, sometime before we go home—not this week but before we go home for the next break.

I do not think this is unreasonable. We are going to ask for everybody's support. Senator LOTT will be happy to explain, when he has an opportunity, about the 31,000 families in Mississippi. But I am going to leave this here, and Senator REID is going to come down and ask it be passed. I hope we can get it done today. If not, we will ask for it tomorrow. If not, we will continue to ask for it until we get it.

We are asking for fairness, not charity, and for justice for the people in the gulf coast.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ANIMAL FIGHTING PROHIBITION

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise this evening to talk about House bill H.R. 137, which has a companion Senate bill, S. 261, the Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act. This is legislation that both the House and Senate have had much discussion on in the last several years, and something I hope will make its way to the consent calendar and final action this evening.

I come to the floor tonight as someone who has been a cosponsor of this legislation for several years now, and as someone who has seen the impact of animal fighting in the state of Washington where animal fighting organizations have not only been a source of all sorts of cruel and inhumane treatment of animals, but also other illegal activity. To me this is legislation that is much needed, and we have passed similar legislation in the State of Washington. It is something we should have a strong Federal statute on.

During October of 2004, there was a major raid in Vancouver, WA, where

police found 21 pit bulls, as well as training logs and other evidence of animal fighting. It got quite a bit of attention as well because there were very high-profile people involved with the animal fighting ring.

There is a long list of other incidents that have happened in Washington State, other activity in Yakima, WA, where various animal fighting organizations were discovered by law enforcement who have done a terrific job of uprooting these organizations in our State. It is important we take an aggressive stance and pass this legislation.

The House bill we are talking about, H.R. 137, recently passed the House of Representatives, I believe with over 300 cosponsors. I am sure it had quite a few others who actually supported the legislation as it passed. We have over 35 cosponsors here with S. 261.

When I look at the legislative history of this bill, it has had remarkably broad bipartisan support. It was passed by both the House and the Senate in the past. It was passed in both Chambers in 2001 and then struck in the conference report. It passed in 2003 in the Senate. It passed in 2005 again in the Senate, a unanimous measure. As I mentioned, it passed the House of Representatives. I think it is fitting that it should be on our consent calendar and hopefully pass this body this evening.

The bottom line is, there are many organizations across the country that have seen the inhumane treatment of animals and have supported this legislation. The American Veterinary Medical Association supports the bill, obviously. The National Sheriffs Association supports this legislation. Police departments have been working in every part of the country and have endorsed this legislation because they see what kind of criminal activity is associated with animal fighting—gambling, drugs, and in one case in Washington State actual murder. The Federal antianimal fighting legislation is important. While we already have a Federal statute on the books, what we don't have is a Federal statute that effectively helps law enforcement meet this growing challenge. That is, with a simple misdemeanor, which is currently on the Federal books, sometimes it takes law enforcement as many as 7 to 8 months to investigate these kinds of crimes. To investigate and put that kind of energy into fighting this kind of criminal activity in our States, and then to have a maximum penalty of only up to 1 year is not adequate.

In fact, in Washington State, in response to the activities that occurred in Vancouver and other parts of our State, our Governor signed an antianimal fighting bill that has been a great model for what we should be doing at the Federal level. As Washington did, this bill would make sure this crime is a felony and that it has adequate penalties. In fact, when the current Federal animal fighting law

was enacted in 1976, only one State made it a felony. Today dogfighting is a felony in 48 States. We need to make sure that it is also a felony at the Federal level for transporting these animals and products associated with animal fighting across State lines. In fact, we are seeing that in many cases.

In Washington State and in Oregon, we have seen this activity, because people in several States are joining together to locate and to make a profit and make investments in these kinds of criminal activities.

We want to make sure we are stamping out this activity. With this legislation, we believe we have a very good chance to say that the Federal Government views this kind of animal fighting as cruel and inhumane, that we consider it a serious criminal activity to drug and force animals to fight and then to enclose them in pits while spectators engage in all sorts of gambling, narcotics trafficking, public corruption, and, in some cases, even violence toward people. That is something we ought to take a tough stance against.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation. I hope we can consider it in tonight's consent calendar, given how the Judiciary Committee has supported this legislation, and how it has passed both the House and Senate in the past.

EASTER

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, the poet Alfred Edward Housman, 1859–1936, wrote in his poem, "A Shropshire Lad," the following verse:

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

The trees are in bloom. In Washington, the annual cherry blossom festival begins this Saturday, March 31, and runs through April 15. It is always a beautiful sight, whether viewed under warm and sunny skies or as the blossoms fall like rain on a misty morning. It is a lovely celebration of Spring and a welcome complement to Easter.

This year Easter falls on April 8, when the Senate will not be in session. Each year, of course, Easter falls on a different day, sometimes with many weeks' difference from year to year. Easter is a very moveable feast and has been throughout its long history. The calculation of when to celebrate Easter has varied through the centuries, being settled for just over 1,427 years by the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. But even today, Easter remains a moveable feast.

The Roman Emperor Constantine convoked the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. to resolve a number of important differences between the religious practices across his empire. The council decided that the Easter festival should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox, thus eternally linking the return of spring with the resurrection of Christ. If the full moon occurred on a

Sunday and thereby coincided with the Passover festival, council further decided that Easter would be commemorated on the following Sunday. The council also declared that the calendar date of Easter would be calculated at Alexandria, in Egypt, which was the leading astronomical center of the fourth century world.

This attempt to reconcile Easter celebrations proved difficult, however, as fourth century astronomy lacked the knowledge to resolve a discrepancy between the solar and lunar years. As a result, the differences between the true astronomical year and the Julian calendar then in use continued to grow. By 387 A.D., churches in France and Egypt were celebrating Easter on dates 35 days apart. In 465 A.D., the church adopted a reformed calendar that fixed the date of Easter, but churches in what is now the United Kingdom refused to adopt the changes.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII reformed the Julian calendar yet again, resulting in the calendar in use in much of the West today—the Gregorian calendar. This new calendar corrected many of the difficulties in fixing the date of Easter and other important ecclesiastical dates. When Great Britain and Ireland adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752, Easter was celebrated on the same day in the Western part of the Christian world. However, the Eastern churches did not adopt the Gregorian calendar, and celebrate Easter on different dates. Occasionally, the two churches' calculations coincide, and Easter is celebrated on the same date throughout the world. The last time that happened was in 1963.

All of these details are fascinating, at least to a longtime fan of the study of history. I find it thought-provoking to consider how the study of astronomy and the development of calendars has affected our daily lives today, as they have the daily life of so many who have come before us. But does it matter, Mr. President, when we celebrate Easter? In the long run, I think, the celebration of that momentous moment in history is far more important than precision on the day of the week. Few events in history have had a more profound impact on our lives. You do not have to be a Christian or an adherent of any particular church or faith, to recognize the impact of Christ's life upon world history, regardless of which day of the week or week of the year it took place.

Christ's message, brought home by His sacrifice at Easter time and His subsequent resurrection, changed the lives of billions of people over the years. In Matthew 28:5-6, we are told, "The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said.'" That much change is bound to have an effect on everyone else.

The rise of a new religion and the power and passion of its churches has changed empires, international bound-

aries, customs, and lifestyles. The Christian religion has grown and spread across the globe, sweeping old religions away.

On this Sunday, Christians observe Palm Sunday, recalling Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem with crosses made of palm leaves like those that were laid across Christ's path to welcome Him. Next Friday, Christians will commemorate Christ's sacrifice on Good Friday, when He took up His crown of thorns and carried His own cross on that long, sad, walk to be crucified. Then on April 8, church bells will ring, and sunrise services will celebrate His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven with the rising sun. It is a deeply moving and uplifting period, Mr. President, and it does not matter when it happens—only that it did happen. Beautiful, blessed Easter, giving hope to us all.

Mr. President, I wish you and yours all the blessings of Easter, with all of its promise of everlasting life spent in the love of the Lord. I close with a poem by Louise Lewin Matthews, called "Easter Morn."

EASTER MORN

(By Louise Lewin Matthews)

Easter morn with lilies fair
Fills the church with perfumes rare,
As their clouds of incense rise,
Sweetest offerings to the skies.
Stately lilies pure and white
Flooding darkness with their light,
Bloom and sorrow drifts away,
On this holy hallow'd day.
Easter lilies bending low
In the golden afterglow,
Bear a message from the sod
To the heavenly towers of God.

TRIBUTE TO MICHAEL A. PARKER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a dedicated public servant and a true friend to the people of Kentucky, Mr. Michael A. Parker. After years of exemplary work as the program manager for the Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives Program at the Department of Defense, Mr. Parker is retiring, and I want to express to him my thanks for his service.

Mr. Parker has held the post of program manager since December 1996. In that role, he consistently worked hard toward the goal of safely and expeditiously disposing of the dangerous chemical agents stored at the Blue Grass Army Depot in Madison County, KY. The people of Madison County are living right next door to over 500 tons of the deadliest material ever conceived by man. Understandably, they would like to see these weapons disposed of as safely and quickly as possible. Mike has been a key player in working toward that goal.

Mike appreciates the unique culture at the Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives Program and understands the need to work closely with the local community to reach acceptable solutions. The people of the Madison County area are going to miss Mike, as will I.

Proof of Mike's drive for excellence in his work lies in his numerous honors and awards. He holds the Presidential Rank Award at both the Distinguished and Meritorious levels. He also holds the Defense Department Distinguished Civilian Service Award, the Army Decoration for Exceptional Civilian Service, the Army Research and Development Achievement Award, the Army Commander's Medal, and the Army Meritorious Civilian Service Award.

Mr. President, Kentucky has been lucky to have such a friend in Michael A. Parker, and I speak for many in the Commonwealth when I say he will be missed. I ask my fellow Senators to join me in thanking Mike for his years of dedication and service and in wishing him good luck in his future endeavors.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I voted against the supplemental appropriations bill because of the provision which specifies a withdrawal date. With President Bush's statement that he will veto the bill, it will be returned to Congress so that we can negotiate with the White House to provide funding to support the troops without a withdrawal date which allows our enemies to wait us out.

I voted against the supplemental appropriations bill for the same reasons that I voted in favor of Senator COCHRAN's amendment to strike a withdrawal date, which amendment failed. The full statement of my reasons appear in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD in the proceedings on March 28, 2007, in relation to the Cochran amendment.

IRAQI TRANSLATOR LEGISLATION

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I strongly support legislation that would increase the number of visas available for Iraqi and Afghan translators.

America has a strong obligation to keep faith with the Iraqis and Afghans who have worked so bravely with us—and have often paid a terrible price for it. Translators have been the eyes and ears of our military, and they have saved American lives. They now have a target on their backs because of their service to our country, and we need to protect them by granting them safe refuge in the United States.

Under the current program, only 50 translators a year from Iraq and Afghanistan are eligible for admission to the United States. So far this year, we have already admitted 50, and 450 more are waiting for admission under the program. At the current rate, that is a 9-year backlog.

These men and women are in mortal danger every day and they should be permitted to come to the United States without delay. They have been recommended by the American military. The Department of Homeland Security agreed that they are eligible for admission to the United States. To ensure